

## Endangered Species

THE ARABISTS: THE ROMANCE OF AN AMERICAN ELITE. By ROBERT D. KAPLAN. Free Press. 333 pp. \$24.95.

Reviewed by MARTIN KRAMER

TEN years ago, on January 18, 1984, two men entered the campus of the American University of Beirut, known by generations of graduates simply and affectionately as AUB. In College Hall, the stately administration building, they approached Malcolm Kerr, the university's president and one of America's leading students of contemporary Arab politics. Kerr had left his professorship at UCLA to guide AUB through the treacherous shoals of Lebanon's war. He returned to the Beirut campus literally as its son: he had been born in the university hospital 52 years earlier, to American parents who served on AUB's faculty.

Kerr was a quintessential Arabist, whose privileged knowledge of the Arabs derived from intimate familiarity and deep sympathy. "Arab-Western relations" was our subject," he once wrote. But that morning, his own analysis of his subject proved fatally wrong: the two visitors shot him through the head, in the name of Islam.

In *The Arabists*, Robert D. Kaplan seeks to explain why such experts, despite the best of intentions and a close familiarity with the Arabs, showed a marked tendency to be fatally wrong. As serving diplomats, they sometimes imperiled not only themselves but the interests of the United States. They were wrong when they argued that the U.S. had to choose between some twenty Arab states and one Israel. They were wrong when they endorsed Arab nationalism as the sole will of the Arab peoples. And they were spectacu-

larly wrong when they built Saddam Hussein into a man of reason, and then inadvertently flashed him a go over Kuwait.

With each miscalculation, more State Department Arabists were eased out of their slots, so that today they appear to be an endangered species. More decisive verdicts on their triumphs and failings will be passed by future historians, who will have full access to the diplomatic archives. But Kaplan has rendered a great service by talking to these men now, before age and infirmity claim them.

THE origins of America's Arabists can be traced back to the 19th century, an age of Protestant missionary fervor and competition. Presbyterians and Congregationalists sent missions to those Ottoman provinces which would later be divided into Syria and Lebanon. Their religious preaching received a tepid response, but the missionaries opened modern schools, and these attracted eager students of every faith. The queen of this American empire of education was the Syrian Protestant College, established in 1866 on "the finest site in all Beirut," a promontory overlooking the Mediterranean.

"They went out to proselytize," wrote the late Elie Kedourie of the American missionaries, "and have stayed to sympathize." That sympathy took the form of support for Arab national sentiment. In the early years, this encouragement was almost inadvertent, the by-product of missionary translations of the New Testament which helped to forge modern Arabic. But in later years, the missionaries deliberately preached the gospel of national self-determination, and Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points proved to have a more potent appeal than the Bible.

In 1920, the Syrian Protestant College became the American University of Beirut. The change of name reflected the new mission of the school: the propagation of American values, through social service and nationalism. A year earlier, Howard Bliss, the college

president, had gone to the Paris Peace Conference to plead the Arab case. Religion thus gave way to politics, and the American expatriates became one of Lebanon's most influential sects, allied especially to the Sunni Muslims and Greek Orthodox Christians in a shared allegiance to Arab nationalism.

Kaplan dwells on the story of the missionaries and educators because their sons became some of America's first Arabist diplomats. They were born and raised in Lebanon, and spoke some Arabic as their birthright. Perhaps the most dashing was Marine Colonel William Eddy, born in Sidon to missionary parents. Eddy became a wartime OSS operative in Tangier and an ambassador to Saudi Arabia, serving as translator at the famous summit between Franklin D. Roosevelt and King Ibn Saud in 1945. The Foreign Service had no better way to secure competent Arabists, who were essential if the U.S. were to edge out rivals in the Arab world. Kaplan attests to the rare talents of men like Eddy, who proved indispensable in tasks requiring a sixth sense of local culture and firm grasp of a difficult language.

But the Arabists also brought the convictions of their fathers straight into the State Department. These included the belief that Arabs were becoming more like Americans with each graduating class of the mission schools and AUB. Good works, not conquest, had won for America an immense moral influence. The Arab world would become America's preserve the moment the U.S. government also endorsed the political cause of Arab independence and unity.

When the U.S. decided instead to support the creation of Israel in 1948, the Arabists felt abandoned. Eddy, for one, resigned, but others stayed on, nursing their resentment. In interview after interview, Kaplan's Arabists make it abundantly clear that they regarded American support for the creation of Israel as a tragic mistake, from which the region and

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America's stature have yet to recover.

Mistake or not, the Arabists aggravated its effects. Phillip J. Baram, in *The Department of State in the Middle East* (1978), has shown that before Israel's creation, the Arabists wrongly led the Arabs to conclude that the U.S. had no interest in Zionism's success. Baram suggests that this

deception of the Arabs—as if, in the making of American foreign policy, presidential, congressional, and domestic opinion counted for naught—was as much a cause of the Arabs' evolving hostility to the U.S. as the substantive fact that after the war American Presidents did support the right of a Jewish state to exist.

It would not be the last time Arabists misled Arabs over the direction of American policy, proving themselves as dangerous to their Arab friends as to their own department.

As Kaplan demonstrates, the Arabists' peculiar talents could only be acquired at the price of prolonged isolation from a rapidly changing America—an isolation that a stint at Deerfield or Exeter, followed by Amherst or Princeton, did little to relieve. Ultimately that price became too steep, and after 1973, when Arab-Israeli "peace-processing" required a broader empathy for Arabs and Jews, most of the Arabists of the old school had to go. Much of Kaplan's story is about how they were put out to pasture under the Nixon and Ford administrations, to be replaced by hybrid diplomats who knew their way not only through the Damascus market but across Dizengoff Street in Tel Aviv.

Some of these newcomers were professional peace-processors, others Kaplan describes as Arabists-lite. In any case, the formula worked, and the veteran Arabists were confounded. "Certainly," wrote Malcolm Kerr, "the United States has been far luckier than it deserved in managing to befriend Israel without sacrificing important interests in the Arab world." Luck indeed, for this immense triumph owed nothing to the old-school Arabists, and

was achieved largely in spite of them.

KAPLAN has told his tale with great verve and felicity of style—talents the Arabists themselves never mustered. Of their British counterparts, it could at least be said that they wrote tirelessly, even feverishly, to give some account of their deeds to a wider public. T. E. Lawrence's *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, the self-serving outpourings of Gertrude Bell and Ronald Storrs, Wilfred Thesiger and Freya Stark—these writings commanded a vast and influential readership. America's Arabists have left no comparable literary legacy.

"Read, travel, read, travel, that's the way to go," Kaplan is told by William Eagleton, a former envoy to Iraq and an ambassador to Syria (whom Francis Fukuyama, quoted in this book, remembers from his own days in the State Department as "the one who always fed us horseshit about how Saddam was a potential moderate"). Eagleton's words sum up the difference between the British and American traditions: the British Arabists would write, travel, write, travel—ever with an eye to the public and posterity. The American Arabists largely subsisted on this borrowed intellectual capital. If they have been misunderstood, it is partly because they disdained getting ink under their nails.

*The Arabists*, then, is likely to stand as their monument for some time to come. All told, they have little cause for complaint. Kaplan displays a genuine admiration for the patriotism, courage, and expertise of many of his interviewees, who emerge from his brief portraits in all their decency and complexity. He has plainly been charmed by them, enough to exonerate them of the charge of anti-Semitism, which was often leveled indiscriminately by their critics. "In the long list of historical adversaries of the Jews," writes Kaplan, "the Arabists could easily claim to be the least noxious. The best of enemies, in other words."

In one Arabist, Kaplan even finds a hero: Hume Horan, the remarkable diplomat who, as ambassador to Sudan, finessed Opera-

tion Moses, the 1984 airlift of Ethiopian Jews to Israel. Horan, whose Arabic reportedly bested that of any of his contemporaries, describes his fellow Arabists as "the Pekinese orchids begot by an American superpower." Kaplan in turn calls him "the orchid of orchids" and "the most advanced form of the Arabist species before it began going extinct." Kaplan's labored comparison between Horan and T. E. Lawrence falls flat. But Horan, in addition to having achieved something of great value, recites the most penetrating lines in *The Arabists* and leaves an appetite for more.

Then comes the antithesis: an Arabist who is held to embody all that went wrong in the tradition. In his hardest-hitting chapter, Kaplan zeroes in on April Glaspie, the last U.S. ambassador to Saddam Hussein and one of the last veteran Arabists. In her final audience with the Iraqi leader, she told him that the United States had "no opinion" on "your border disagreement with Kuwait." Iraq invaded Kuwait a week later.

The portrait of Glaspie is unsparing (she tried to be "twice as much of an old boy as the real old boys"); so too is the description of her performance in Baghdad as a "disgrace." Glaspie herself declined to be interviewed by Kaplan, and her defense has been left in this book to the veteran Arabists, who cast her as a victim of the Bush administration's indulgent Iraq policy. Kaplan is unconvinced, arguing that "she was a driver and a hard-core believer in this policy down to the very end."

This is a debate that will rage for years, even after historians have the documentary evidence. But Kaplan has made a compelling *prima-facie* case against Glaspie, one which includes ample testimony from other diplomats that, whatever the precise genesis of American policy, this variety of Arabist, with her known weakness for Arab radicals, was in the wrong place at the wrong time. The episode leads inexorably to the conclusion that there are not many right places left in the Arab world, even for the most able survivors of the old guard.



HAD Kaplan taken his research a step further, he would have noted the subtle exchange that has occurred between diplomacy and academe. The Arabists had to go because they could not adapt to the American role of making peace between Arabs and Israelis. But their decline in the Department of State has been accompanied by their ascendancy in departments of Arab, Islamic, and Middle Eastern studies. When Malcolm Kerr was turned away from the Foreign Service for health reasons, he went into the university. Now his second choice has become the first choice of a new generation.

In that light, Kaplan might have dissected the Middle East Institute in Washington, D.C., which has done more than any other institution to facilitate the transition from Arabist expertise to semi-scholarly authority. More recently, scholars who fled AUB during Lebanon's war have helped to transform major centers and academic departments in this country into the last outposts of Arab nationalism. Some campuses, afflicted by an endemic third-worldism or tempted by oil money, have provided hothouse conditions for the survival and spread of the views Kaplan examines. In these redoubts of tenured Arabism, the intellectual campaign against an Arab-Israeli settlement is already being waged. *The Arabists* is therefore unfinished: there is a crying need for a final chapter, perhaps entitled "The Retreat to the Academy."

And while no young diplomat would call himself an Arabist, the Department of State is not completely in the clear, either. On the sidelines of the peace process, the last keepers of the Arabist flame pose as authoritative interpreters of Islamic fundamentalism. As they see it, radical Islam is the harbinger of a Protestant-like reformation, from which all Islam will emerge more democratic and more egalitarian. The radicals should not be fought, they argue, but gently guided to the light.

This is, of course, a political reworking of the unanswered prayer of the Arabists' missionary forebears for the conversion of the

Muslims. Malcolm Kerr, whose wife eulogized him at his death as "a nonreligious missionary," was gunned down by just this kind of Islam. It remains to be seen whether such political evangelists can now persuade America to turn the other cheek yet one more time.

### Neocon-bashing

**BEAUTIFUL LOSERS: ESSAYS ON THE FAILURE OF AMERICAN CONSERVATISM.** By SAMUEL FRANCIS. *University of Missouri Press.* 256 pp. \$37.50.

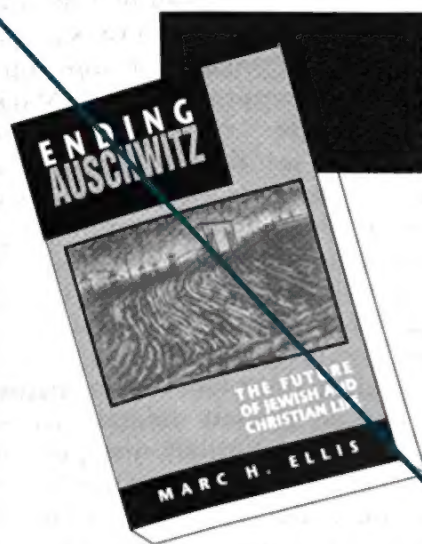
Reviewed by DAN HIMMELFARB

**T**AXONOMISTS of American conservatism typically divide their subject into four categories—Old Right, New Right, neoconservatives, and libertarians—and the tension among these groups has been a recurring theme in discussions of the American Right.

DAN HIMMELFARB contributed "Conservative Splits" to our May 1988 issue.

In the 50's, 60's, and 70's, one could hardly open an issue of *National Review* without encountering an article or review that dealt in some way with the conflict between libertarianism and the Old Right (the latter usually referred to as "traditionalist" conservatism). The libertarian-traditionalist conflict has not disappeared, of course, but relatively little is written about it today; in the 80's and 90's, the neoconservatives have replaced the libertarians as the principal internecine foes of the Old Right. With the new nemesis, moreover, there has come new terminology: if a conservative who is not a libertarian is a "traditionalist," a conservative who is not a neoconservative must be a "paleoconservative"—which is what an Old Rightist is often called today.

Samuel Francis's *Beautiful Losers* is the latest offensive in the neo/paleo war. As it happens (and just to complicate matters), Francis himself apparently prefers the populist New Right to the high-



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